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Richmond Thackeray Willoughby Ritchie, *British Interests on the Coast of Arabia, Koweit, Bahrein, and El Katr* (Government of India, 1905).

This document consists of an analysis of British interests on the coast of Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. It was written by Richmond Thackeray Willoughby Ritchie and published in 1905. It is composed of four sections dealing with the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar.

Arabian coast. This cites a letter, 5th January 1903, from the Government of India to the Naval Commander-in-Chief, noting it gives a concise overview of 'the political geography of the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf': the claims to rule by the Ottomans, Trucial Chiefs and the Sultan of Muscat. It then reviews key treaties with the Sheikhs of Kuwait (23rd January, 1899), Bahrain, Trucial Chiefs, the 1891 treaty with Muscat, and the agreements with Shaikhs down the coast to Aden.

Kuwait. This section discusses two issues with the Turks at Kuwait. Firstly, the status of the British Political Agent, Major Stuart George Knox and his instructions concerning the conflicts and dynamics between Ibn Saud, Ibn Rashid and the Turks. The second issue concerns rights over Bubiyan Island.

Bahrain. This section discusses British non-recognition of Turkish authority in Bahrain and measures to assert British authority there, referring to reports by Sir Nicholas Roderick O'Connor.

Qatar. This section discusses Turkish influence in Qatar and the reasons why the conclusions of a treaty with the the ruling Al Thani shikh by the Government of India would be desirable.



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British Interests on the Coast of Arabia, Koweit,
Bahrein, and El Katr.

The following extract from a letter of the 5th January 1903, from the Government of India to the Naval Commander-in-Chief, gives a succinct statement of the political geography of the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf. The places named are marked in the attached copy of Curzon's map.

"From Koweit to Katif town Ottoman rule has long been recognised, and, in fact, though this has never been explicitly admitted, it would be difficult to dispute Turkish claims to exercise jurisdiction as far as, and inclusive of, Ojair. South of this place, and on the El Katr peninsula, His Majesty's Government have declined to recognise Turkish sovereignty, though the Turks actually have a garrison at El Bidaa. . . .

"From and inclusive of Odeid eastward, the coast belongs to the Trucial Chiefs as far as Ras-el-Kheima. Thence, starting from Rams south of Tibba, round the Musandim promontory, to Dibba, the country is in the occupation of the Shihooh tribe. Claims have been put forward by the Sultan of Muscat to exercise jurisdiction over this tract, but it has been held that his ascendancy is so indeterminate that it need not be considered.

"From Dibba southward to Khor Kalba, the Batineh coast is regarded as part of the territory of the Sheikh of Shargah. The local Sheikhs have from time to time invoked the assistance of the Sultan of Muscat, but the Government of India have decided that no interference by Muscat can be admitted; that this portion of the coast is subject to the maritime truce; and that the Sheikh in power is bound by the terms of the agreements which have from time to time been concluded with the Trucial Chiefs."

The British Government has treaties with the Sheikhs of Koweit and Bahrein, and with the Trucial Chiefs mentioned in the Government of India's letter quoted above.

The Koweit Treaty (23rd January 1899) provides that the Sheikh shall not receive the Agent or representative of any Foreign Power without the consent of the British Government, and shall not sell, lease, mortgage, or give for occupation any portion of his territory to any Foreign Power or the subject of any Foreign Power. Simultaneously with the signing of the Treaty, the Resident wrote to the Sheikh promising him the good offices of the British Government, and impressing on him as a condition of the Agreement that it should be kept *secret and not divulged* without our consent. The Treaty was accompanied with a gift of Rs. 15,000.

The treaties with Bahrein and the Trucial Chiefs are on the same lines; but provide not only that the Chief shall receive no representative of any Foreign Power, but that he shall not enter into any agreement or hold any correspondence with any Foreign Power. And, as regards the cession of territory, these treaties provide that the Chief will not sell, lease, &c., any territory except to the British Government. These treaties contain no promise of protection or good offices.

It may be added that we have a treaty with Muscat (of 1891) by which the Sultan agrees not to cede, sell, mortgage, &c., any portion of his territory save to the British Government, and that along the southern coast of Arabia, west of Dhofar, where Muscat territory ends, we have agreements with the Sheikhs, along the coast as far as Aden and the Red Sea, binding them not to hold correspondence or enter into agreements with Foreign Powers. This stipulation in the majority of cases is accompanied by one precluding the Chief from parting with territory.

KOWEIT.

Koweit has no immediate and direct relation with the question of the policy to be pursued on the coast south of Ojair where Turkish sovereignty
S. S. 4.



is held to end, except in so far as our proceedings at Koweit influence the attitude of the Turks towards us in El Katr and Bahrein.

The questions at issue at present with the Turks at Koweit are :—

(1) *The status of our Political Agent.*—Major Knox was sent in August 1904 to Koweit in connection with the difficulties arising from Turkish complaints that the Sheikh was supporting Ibn Saoud (the Wahabi), who had defeated Ibn Rashid (the Turkish *protégé*) in Nejd, and whose successes seem sufficient to threaten the continuance of Turkish rule in the interior. The Turks, who apparently believe that we are instigating the Sheikh of Koweit to support Ibn Saoud, at once complained of Major Knox's appointment. We replied that the appointment was not a permanent one, but that we reserved the right of sending an officer to Koweit at our "uncontrolled discretion" to report and "ensure the continuance of the *modus vivendi*" which had been arrived at. We also instructed the Government of India (26th November 1904) that Major Knox might remain at Koweit for the present, that he was to be withdrawn after a "reasonable interval," and that before leaving he was to inform the Sheikh that he would repeat his visits, and that the date of his return would depend on the course of events. The present position is governed by these instructions. It should be added that the Resident recently reported that the Sheikh of Koweit was going with Ibn Saoud to Basra to come to terms with the Turks. Other reports, however, say that the Turks are organising a military expedition on a large scale to put down Ibn Saoud and the Wahabi movement. Major Knox's instructions are that he is not to say or do anything to connect us even indirectly with the warfare now in progress in the interior, and that he is to repeat to the Sheikh the warning to avoid entanglements in the interior given him by Lord Curzon personally when he visited Koweit.

(2.) *Bubian Island.*—The island is apparently a desolate mud-flat, where Koweit fishermen have certain rights. It is of importance as commanding one bank of the Khor Abdullah, which will presumably be the channel of approach to the harbour at the terminus of the Baghdad Railway. In 1902 Sir N. O'Connor protested against the action of the Turks in placing a military post (of some 10 men, relieved at intervals from Fao) on the island. In May 1904 Sir N. O'Connor reverted to the subject, saying that unless the post was withdrawn, it would be necessary to raise the question "in a more unpleasant form." The action to be taken, in event of a Turkish failure to voluntarily withdraw this post, has been reserved for consideration. The proposal of the Government of India was either to insist on Turkish withdrawal or to allow the Sheikh to establish a post of his own.

BAHREIN.

Our relations with Bahrein are governed by the treaty already mentioned. The island is situated in a deep bay : it faces on the west the Turkish district of Katif, and, on the east, the peninsula of El Katr, in which we do not recognise Turkish authority. The place is of importance as the centre of the pearl fisheries of the Gulf. It is also the residence of a number of British Indian traders, whose export trade in dates from Katif has recently caused some difficulty with the Turkish Government owing to the extortions of the local Turkish authorities.

We do not recognise Turkish authority in Bahrein. In 1895 we forcibly dispersed, in the interests of the Bahrein Sheikh, a settlement of malcontents who had established themselves at Zobara, on the Katr coast, under the Turkish flag. The Turks protested, but His Majesty's Government stated in reply that they did not recognise Turkish jurisdiction on the Katr coast and "must repeat once more that all Turkish claims to Bahrein, which is under the protection of the Queen of England, are totally inadmissible." (*Note Verbale* of 12th August 1895.)

In 1901 Sir N. O'Connor, reporting on the action of the Government of India in recognising the Sheikh's eldest son as his successor, said that any arrangement which strengthened our authority over Bahrein must be regarded with satisfaction, and added that he would welcome the news that a British or British Indian subject had been appointed Director of the Bahrein Customs as a material proof of our authority over the island. Sir N. O'Connor further



pointed out that the Porte, if they thought they could count upon the support of any Foreign Power in asserting their supremacy over the island, would not lose the opportunity of doing so. In this connection it should be mentioned that an inquiry was received from the French Government in July last as to bringing Bahrein within the jurisdiction of their Vice-Consulate at Bushire, the reason given being that French subjects have come to establish themselves on the island and carry on pearl fishing. The Government of India were in favour of postponing the reply to the French request, and this view, as far as this Office is aware, has been accepted by the Foreign Office.

In August 1904 the Government of India were authorised, with a view to strengthening our position with the Sheikh, to appoint an officer of the Regular Political Service as Resident, in place of the existing Agent who was of a lower official status. A small guard of Native Infantry was also sanctioned, and it was arranged that a suitable vessel should be placed at the disposal of the Political Officer to be used if necessary in the suppression of piracy in the shallower waters of the coast. Sir N. O'Connor, who was consulted, replied that he had felt strongly for some years past, that we were losing the opportunity of asserting our supremacy in Bahrein, that he sincerely welcomed the proposals of the Government of India, and that he undertook that the Turkish Government should raise no serious difficulties.

The above statement may perhaps suffice to explain the position of Bahrein in connection with the present question of the action to be taken in consequence of the outrages committed by retainers of the Sheikh's nephew on certain German and Persian subjects. The German case has already been met by the punishment of the offenders and the payment of compensation. In the Persian case the Sheikh seems recalcitrant. There seems no objection to the proposals made by the Government of India with a view to obtain redress and to ensure order in the future, except as regards the recommendation that we should seize the Custom House and not give it up till the Sheikh accepts British management of his Customs. At present the Customs are farmed to British Indian banias, with the result that the Chief only receives a revenue of rather more than a lakh, which is a third only of the estimated yield of an efficient system. In their Despatch of 21st April 1904, the Government of India explained that the Sheikh had on several occasions promised not to renew his leases to the farmers when they fell in, but that he had failed to keep his word when the time came; and they said that they regarded the question of Customs reform as a test case of the nature and degree of the influence which the British Government may reasonably claim to exercise over the Sheikh. A compromise would be to insist on the Sheikh cancelling the leases (with compensation to the farmers), and assuming the administration himself. This would assimilate the Bahrein practice to that of Muscat, where the Sultan has abolished the farming system, but has consistently refused to put the administration under British control, retaining the management in his own hands. The adoption of this change by the Sheikh of Bahrein might or might not lead to his agreeing subsequently to placing the administration under a British official.

EL KATR.

The notification to the Porte of 12th August 1895 (mentioned above) sufficiently establishes the fact that His Majesty's Government do not recognise Turkish jurisdiction over the Katr coast. But the force of the statement is somewhat modified by the fact that since 1872 there has been a Turkish garrison at El Bidaa. In 1868 we concluded an agreement with the then Sheikh (the father of the present Sheikh), by which he bound himself to take no hostile action by sea, and to refer all disputes to the Resident in the Persian Gulf. Sheikh Jasim, the present Sheikh, on succeeding his father, applied for a renewal of the Agreement, but this was refused (in 1882) on the ground of the nature of his relations with the Turks.

Sheikh Jasim is now of a very great age, and the virtual ruler is his brother, Sheikh Ahmed, with whom the Government of India are exceedingly



desirous that a treaty should be made in anticipation of the death of Sheikh Jasim. An opportunity of making such a treaty arose last year, when the Turks disturbed the *status quo* by appointing officials to various places on the coast, and when the Government of India proposed that a treaty should be entered into with Sheikh Ahmed on the lines of our treaties with Bahrein and the Trucial Chiefs, by which he would be debarred from dealings with Foreign Powers, and from parting with territory to others than the British Government. The Turks, however, withdrew their interloping officials in deference to our remonstrances; and the Government of India were instructed to report whether the objects to be gained by a treaty were of such urgent importance as to justify immediate action in spite of the difficulties which such action would create with the Turks. The Government of India replied, in their telegram of the 30th December, by proposing the immediate conclusion with Sheikh Ahmed of a treaty similar to that of 1868, which would bind him to take no hostile action by sea, and to refer all disputes to the Resident in the Persian Gulf.

The reasons in favour of the immediate conclusion of a treaty are—

- (1.) The Katr coast, lying as it does between Bahrein and the Pirate coast, constitutes a break in the continuity of our maritime influence.
- (2.) The absence of a treaty may hinder His Majesty's ships in the work of suppressing piracy and maintaining the peace of the Gulf. In this connection it may be observed that the objection to the extension of Turkish authority in those regions is that the Turks cannot establish a strong administration, and that their attempt to rule El Katr might only end in anarchy. Bahrein, as the centre of the pearl fisheries, attracts pirates.
- (3.) The absence of a treaty considerably increases the difficulty of making arrangements to protect the pearl fisheries from outside interference which has been threatened by certain Frenchmen settled in Bahrein. The question of what powers we possess in this respect under our existing treaties with the local Sheikhs is under the consideration of the Law Officers of the Crown.
- (4.) The absence of a treaty may encourage the Turks to set up a rival Sheikh to Sheikh Ahmed on the death of Sheikh Jasim. In this connection it may be observed that Sheikh Ahmed and the Arabs of El Katr are Wahabis, and presumably sympathise with Ibn Saoud in his attack on Turkish authority in the interior. It is thus of importance to them that the new Sheikh should be on their side against Ibn Saoud.

From the point of view of the Government of India, the balance of advantage seems to lie on the side of a treaty with Sheikh Ahmed; and it has been suggested that, as any treaty with him will raise a difficulty with the Turks, if there is to be a treaty, it should be on the lines of those with the Trucial Chiefs.

On the other hand, if we make a treaty it will be incumbent on us to support Sheikh Ahmed if, on the death of Sheikh Jasim, he becomes embroiled with the Turks, and a fresh chapter of difficulties with the Porte may be opened. To leave the situation in El Katr to work itself out without interference on our part, even though the ultimate result may be the restoration of a nominal Turkish sovereignty, would not be inconsistent with the policy laid down in Lord Lansdowne's Minute of 21st March 1902, as to the position at Koweit. Lord Lansdowne stated that the "bed rock" of our policy in the Gulf is that "while we do not grudge a *débouché* for "international commerce in the Gulf, and have no wish to make it into a "British lake, we should resist to the utmost all attempts by other Powers "to obtain a foothold on its shores for naval or military purposes "We shall pursue that policy not in virtue of ambiguous understandings "with local Chiefs, but as the predominant Power in Southern Persia and "the Persian Gulf."

R. RITCHIE.

30th January 1905.